



Coast Guard Flag Voice 35

Since 1993, we have implemented various policies to both increase assignment lengths and best manage Permanent Change of Station (PCS) expenditures (reduce unnecessary assignment turnover). This Flag Voice will recap previous and describe new efforts. It is important to understand retirements, RELADS and completion of arduous duty (overseas isolated, sea duty) drive just about all transfers. There are few, if any, moves that are truly "discretionary."

Policies currently in place:

The Senior Enlisted Assignment Policy (SEAP) provides assignment flexibility by allowing E-7s, E-8s, and E-9s to fill billets higher or lower than their respective pay grade to meet Service needs. This policy realizes PCS savings and geographic stability because a member does not move purely because of advancement, unless a clear Service need prevails. The Petty Officer Assignment Policy (POAP) provides assignment flexibility by allowing E-4s, E-5s, and E-6s to fill billets higher or lower than their respective pay grade to meet Service needs. This policy realizes PCS savings and geographic stability for the same reasons as SEAP.

The Geographic Stability Policy provides geographic stability for members and reduces PCS expenditures by encouraging local moves, no cost-transfers, and extensions. During FY98, 26.4% of all officers and 26.2% of all enlisted members eligible for transfer received assignments that resulted in geographic stability through extensions, no-cost, and low-cost orders. In conjunction with this policy, we've taken these actions:

Eliminated the six-year automatic move policy.

Established a liberal extension policy.

Adjusted most E-4 and E-5 billets from three- to four-year tour lengths.

Increased overseas tour lengths.

We have implemented these new policies beginning with the FY99 assignment season: Authorization to extend tour lengths up to two years at the member's request. Before this policy change, members could request to extend their current assignment tour length in one-year increments only.

Non-rate tour length change. We've changed the tour lengths for non-rated (junior enlisted) personnel to match those of the units to which assigned as outlined in the Tour Lengths for Enlisted Personnel table

in Article 4.A.5.b. of the Personnel Manual. Our previous policy of moving all E-2/3's after two years was intended to give them a better picture of the Coast Guard's duties. However, this has run counter to other workforce and local units' needs. For those junior enlisted not interested in going off to "A" school, this change benefits the unit by maintaining junior enlisted continuity and allowing units to capitalize on their training investments, especially if the member is striking. On the other hand, it also may spur members to advance by striking or attending Class "A" School.

Surfman. Several changes have been made to retain surfmen in the surf community. A member assigned as a trainee to a surf station will complete a six-year, not a four-year, tour there. Also, a certified surfman in a surfman billet who advances will not be transferred merely because of advancement.

Potential policy changes in process:

Overseas screening process. We have been working closely with overseas commanders to develop a process that better screens members and dependents with the goal to further reduce the early return of dependents.

We recently considered but did not adopt changing WPB tour lengths from 2 to 3 years because of the nature of the mission and associated personnel fatigue. The continued shortage of people affects the assignment process considerably. With insufficient people to cover all billets, especially during the high Optempo summer season, the gaps that do appear become all that more "critical" to a unit's readiness. Hence, the call for almost "immediate" transfers to fill the gaps, creating an even greater "churn" in assignments and hence shorter tour lengths. In essence, the effect of "geo-stability" policies is reduced. As we fill the workforce, we should see this pace gradually slow. Also, our studies show our General Detail, the additional billets that cover for members' reassignment or medical, administrative, etc. non-availability, is inadequate to handle the "peak" summer transfer months.

In response, we are looking at new ways of doing business, such as a constant loaded "12 month" assignment process. A 12-month process has both pluses and minuses which need to be fully explored. In the interim, using command concern (COMCON) submissions, we again are attempting to "spread out" the assignment window by moving some people early in March and April and spread out member arrival and departure dates throughout the busy spring and summer season. We will carefully evaluate the results of this strategy in the Fall. Please refer to ALDIST 037/99 for details.

I am also concerned about the low numbers on some "A" School lists and insufficient numbers on certain advancement lists. Carrying a shortage of people for a considerable amount of time, as we have in the past few years, creates "flow" problems in the rating "pipelines." Filling the workforce at the bottom end will not, by itself, truly fill the workforce unless we also fill at all grade levels and ratings. Our junior members must be encouraged to get onto "A" School lists and petty officers encouraged onto advancement lists. I call on all leaders and supervisors to help provide this critical career counseling.

Given our goal to improve geographic stability, it still must be remembered the "needs of the Service"

always will be the primary consideration in the assignment process and take priority over geographic stability policies.

Regards, FL Ames

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